

**"I want my letters," demanded Mrs. Mufty's fearsome visitor. He came nearer and nearer, drawing his sword**

# THE GENERAL'S GHOST

**by MacKinlay Kantor**

*Illustrated by Floyd Davis*



Mr. Drummond noted that Miss Jardine was dainty and nylon-haired

## A Short Story

**T**HE little old ladies of New York tremble forth especially on fair days, and this spring day was one of the fairest. Mrs. Mufty had a black silk umbrella with a mother-of-pearl handle; she used the umbrella for a cane. She descended the uneven stone steps of her house, and started east in Twelfth Street.

She would walk as far as Washington Square. She wanted to see whether the Department of Parks had scrubbed General Grace's statue. She had written them letters about it.

In the Square, four little boys were playing around the base of the statue. The General's horse reared; its rider bent in his bronze saddle, flourishing gauntleted fingers... No, there was no discipline or decency among the men who looked after the parks and their gigantic inhabitants. Pigeons had dec-

orated General Grace's hat and cloak; his habiliments were soiled and unsoldierly.

Mrs. Mufty made sounds of disapproval, and the four little boys stared while she toiled up the steps and stood in the shadow of upraised hooves.

She tapped the horse's leg with her umbrella. "Do you know who this statue is?"

**T**HE smallest child was dark and swarthy. "Sure, that's General Grace."

"Who was he?"

One of the boys whispered, "Come on, Frankie, let's scam." "He was a soldier, lady," said Frankie.

She told them: "Major-General L. A. Grace, killed at Farmville, Virginia, April the sixth, Eighteen hundred and sixty-five. That was a long time ago." She came down the

steps laboriously, and said, "Now, what war did General Grace fight in? Tell me that."

Three of the boys retreated, giggling. But black-eyed Frankie showed his fine teeth and said, "The Civil War, when North fought against South, and brother against brother."

Mrs. Mufty said, "You're a bright little boy."

She started away and then thought for a time; behind her, the boys began to shinny up the horse's hind legs. Mrs. Mufty fumbled deep in her black leather bag. "Come here," she called. "Frankie, you come here," and he came slowly. She gave him a quarter. "Now," she said, "next time I come past here, I want you to tell me just what General Grace *did* when he fought in the Civil War. Mind you find out!"

Frankie sprinted toward the ice-cream cart, with the other boys screaming behind.

Mrs. Mufty said to herself, "Wouldn't they be surprised if they knew who I was?" She crossed the street, pride warm within her.

The taxi-driver, the bare-headed man, all Fifth Avenue would be surprised, and Washington Square North. In other days, other people had lived at Washington Square North, and most of them had known Mrs. Michael Mufty. But there were few left to know her.

**A**LL people, she said to herself, would be surprised. She realized that, to them General Grace was only a matter of nine noted statues — a grimy composite of nine differently shaped men and nine differently shaped horses — in towns, on battlefield sites, on the hill of Arlington. He was General Grace, jaunty and youthful amid the shadows of Lincoln and Grant and the rest. Abe Lincoln said, "Fourscore and seven years ago." Sherman said, "War is hell." U. S. Grant said, "Let them keep their horses; they'll need them for spring ploughing." Spike Grace said, "Come along, boys, you'll never die any younger."

They carved his name on marble colonnades, but thus far no one had carved Polly Wales' name beside it, although it seemed that they should; and lately Mrs. Mufty had come to believe that they should carve her own name as well, for she was Polly's sister.

Shadows growing shorter and the air growing hot... She stopped to fan herself... It was hot in New Jersey, too, when Mrs. Mufty was only eight years old.

"I remember," she had said to audiences who no longer sat rapt at her words — "I remember the first day General Grace came to our house. He was commissioned as a captain then. He and my brother John had recently left West Point. Father sent a wagon to the station, but they missed it and had to walk... I sat on the steps, with my doll..."

All these little cresses, these frail stems of weedy memory, she had lifted bit by bit from quiet waters of the past; she had them pressed in her album, flat and tangible.

And more than memories she owned, locked in a steel box under her bed. There was other treasure, of course; but she let the Manhattan Trust worry about that... Her true treasure was not locked in a vault. She slept above it each night, and no one dared take it from her.

**I**N THE office of Peelson and Brothers, Publishers, Mr. Dick Peelson sent for his editor, Mr. Drummond.

"Fred," asked Mr. Peelson, "have you read this Jardine book?"

Young Mr. Drummond came around the desk and bent down. When he saw a familiar orange cardboard box crammed with white pages, he smiled. "That's the manuscript I gave to Ralph," he said. "'Silver Sword,' by Margaret Jardine. What do you think of it?"

Mr. Peelson fingered his gray mustache. "Ralph's quite favorable," he said. "Here's his report."

Drummond read the report, and grinned. "I think it's all true, and more. I'll multiply his verdict by two: it's a remarkable biography of a great soldier. Have you read it yourself?" he asked.

Peelson nodded, and filled his pipe. "I called you in because the author is in the reception room. She's inquiring about the manuscript. I want you to talk to her. See what you can find out about those letters."

Mr. Drummond raised his eyebrows. "I remember; an old lady has them. The author wrote that it was impossible for her to get hold of them: the owner refused to talk to her."

"I thought," said Mr. Peelson, shrouding himself in smoke, "that the old lady might listen to you. Don't talk contract now to the author; but get full information from her about those love letters, and stall her for a day or two. In the meantime, perhaps you can persuade the owner to lend them."

"Good," said Drummond. He took the heavy manuscript

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